

## Expectant Watchfulness

Imani sat staring out of the campus coffee shop window. The overcast, rainy day was indicative of her mood as of late.

Imani was anxious about her upcoming finals. She was concerned about how one class could tarnish her 3.8 grade-point average. Then there was her breakup with Autry, which was six months old, but she still felt the tire treads on her heart after his sudden, badly explained departure.

Also, Imani had been in an accident (the fault of the other driver). But while her car was being repaired, she was without transportation and stressed about the \$500 deductible. Most of all, she had berated her roommate last week about a recurring incident. She later repented to the Lord and the roommate. But things had been somewhat “cool” between them, although Imani had gone out of her way to show goodwill with a few material gestures.

So, Imani was waiting on God for . . . what? She didn’t know what exactly. She had been praying for help and guidance. Imani felt like she was in a somewhat dry place spiritually. But if there was one thing she could count on in life, it was the Lord!

Imani sipped her chai tea latte and prayed, “My hope is in You, Lord.”

- 1.** *What is a life situation when your options were limited and all you could do was wait?*
- 2.** *In that time, what were some negative experiences that later turned out to bear fruit in your life? How did that time develop your character?*
- 3.** *How can you cultivate a positive, faith-filled attitude?*

## Out of the Depths

*Psalm 130:1-2, KJV*

1 Out of the depths have  
I cried unto thee, O LORD.

2 Lord, hear my voice:  
let thine ears be atten-  
tive to the voice of my  
supplications.

*Psalm 130:1-2, NIV*

A song of ascents.

<sup>1</sup>Out of the depths I cry to you,  
LORD;

<sup>2</sup>Lord, hear my voice.  
Let your ears be attentive  
to my cry for mercy.

The psalmist cries out to God from “the depths” (vs. 1). He does not mean deep, still water. His cry is that of one in distress. “The depths” is a term typically used in connection with the sea or with water (Isa. 51:10; Ezek. 27:34). It is associated with the dangers of the wild, untamable ocean. When the author perceives himself to be in the depths, he recognizes that he has fallen into the clutches of a mighty foe against whom he has no hope of prevailing.

At the outset, he gives no immediate cause for being in the depths or even what the depths are. He only recognizes he is there and so does all that he knows to do: He cries to the Lord for mercy.

This cry for mercy begins with the simple request that the Lord hear his voice. He may feel distant from the Lord, but the cry that bursts forth is an expression of trust that the Lord does, in fact, hear him. The distance does not muffle the sound. His pleas will fall on attentive ears. He repeats the request, not because he thinks God needs many words in order to respond (see Matt. 6:7-8), but because the repetition reflects the earnestness of his appeal for help and the gravity of his situation.

**4.** *How does the author display both a true expression of his feelings and a strong sense of trust in God?*

**5.** *Why does the author repeat his request that God hear him?*

**6.** *What important addition to the cry comes in verse 2?*

## Iniquity and Fear

*Psalm 130:3-4, KJV*

3 If thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

*Psalm 130:3-4, NIV*

<sup>3</sup>If you, LORD, kept a record of sins,

Lord, who could stand?

<sup>4</sup>But with you there is

forgiveness,

so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

The psalmist now reveals his reason for crying for mercy. The depths he finds himself in are not those of a storm-swept sea or the fiery furnace. His straits are much worse. He has recognized the deep, dark places of his heart. He sees his sin, and he recognizes that he is utterly helpless before the God who sees the secret thoughts of man's heart (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39; Ps. 38:9).

He recognizes, too, the holiness of God.. There is no pretense on his part to have ground for hope in himself. No one who sins (and that includes everyone) has the merit to stand before the Judge of all the earth.

But the psalmist also knows something important. The heart of God toward sinners is merciful (Deut. 30:1-10; cf. Eph. 2:4-5). So, though it is true that no sinner can stand before God on his own, yet God does, indeed, hear the cries of those who plead with Him to be merciful, and He offers forgiveness.

God does not forgive sinners merely to send them on their way so that they can return to their sins. The purpose statement in verse 4 clearly shows that God's merciful forgiveness is meant to lead to repentance and obedience.

**7.** *How does verse 3 help you better understand the situation of the psalmist and his pleas in verses 1-2?*

**8.** *What kind of statement is in the second half of verse 4? What does that reveal about the purpose of God's forgiveness?*

## Waiting on the Lord

*Psalm 130:5-6, KJV*

5 I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.

6 My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

*Psalm 130:5-6, NIV*

<sup>5</sup>I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.

<sup>6</sup>I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Having expressed confidence that the Lord offers forgiveness of sins when he knows that he deserves only wrath, the psalmist's whole countenance changes. No longer does the wretchedness of his sin weigh him down to the depths. Instead, he waits.

The kind of waiting that the psalmist experiences is not the tense waiting of someone who earnestly desires something but is unsure if they will receive it or not. He has put his hope in God's "word" (vs. 5), which means that his hope is secure. He has heard God's promise, that those for whom atonement is made are certainly forgiven (see Lev. 4:20). Now he is content; he knows God will keep His word.

The repeated line in verse 6 accentuates the psalmist's confident waiting. Watchmen wait for the morning through those difficult, dark hours of the night before light. They know that dawn will come. They eagerly desire it and know it will not fail. The psalmist is so confident in God's mercy, he's more certain than the watchman awaiting the dawn.

**9.** *What change came over the psalmist after he expressed his confidence in God?*

**10.** *How is the psalmist like a watchman waiting for the morning?*

## The Corporate Call to Wait

*Psalms 130:7-8, KJV*

7 Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.

8 And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

*Psalms 130:7-8, NIV*

<sup>7</sup>Israel, put your hope in the LORD,  
for with the LORD is unfailing love  
and with him is full redemption.

<sup>8</sup>He himself will redeem Israel  
from all their sins.

Verse 7 marks a sudden shift. *I's* dominate verses 1-6 in essentially a confession of faith to God. Now there is a shift. As the psalmist waits for God to redeem him, like an expectant watchman, he calls others to join him.

The psalm is bound up with the expectation of deliverance from sins. He understands that the way God has acted toward him is not out of step with God's character. So he concludes that God will act the same way toward all the people. Thus, he is confident that as he has been redeemed from his sin, so God "will redeem Israel from all their sins" (vs. 8). Their God is one who is characterized by unfailing love. Those with whom He enters into covenant may be sure of God's steadfast love. Even though Israel might have sinned and turned away, the promise was always that if they put their hope in him, he would deliver them and heal them (Deut. 30:1-10).

The certainty of the promise is emphasized by the reflective pronoun "himself" in verse 8. Who will redeem Israel? God Himself. The people are dependent on no one but God alone to do the work of saving. And so, they may rest secure in their hope.

**11.** *In this psalm, what is the common problem faced by the psalmist and the nation as a whole?*

**12.** *How does the character of God serve as the foundation for this whole psalm?*

## Hope from the Abyss

In today's Scripture, the psalmist is in a place of deepest darkness: "the depths"—a place of no light, no rescue, no hope. But even in that lost and hopeless abyss, he remembers the love and mercy of God and cries out, trusting that somehow the Lord will hear and have mercy on him. And he has good reason for that hope, because this has been Israel's experience and his own experience, with God in the past. In fact, he is so sure of this hope, he calls on Israel to put their hope in the Lord and call out to Him as well. Even though he has not yet been rescued, he is as confident in God's salvation as a night watchman is confident that the sun will rise in the morning.

The psalmist illustrates for us how we can feel two things at the same time that seem contradictory. The situation looks hopeless, yet he has hope. He seems defeated, yet he tells Israel how to be victorious. This is a great illustration of how we can choose what our response will be to life situations, rather than reacting instinctively to the way things appear on the surface. Even when all the evidence says we're defeated, we have a choice to respond to the curveballs of life as people who see only through their physical eyes, or as people who see with the eyes of faith.

People who see faults and limitations, or people who see successes and possibilities. Which will you choose?

**13.** *Have you felt as discouraged as the psalmist? In what life situations have you felt like you were "in the depths"?*

**14.** *At that time, were you able to maintain faith that God would rescue you? What helped you do that?*

**15.** *At your worst times, have you felt that you can point others to God, or did you hold back until you had your life together?*

## Multigenerational Waiting

As Christians we've been waiting more than 2,000 years for the fulfilment of Christ's promise to return and pronounce final judgment on the world. But we find many other areas of our lives where we need to be patient and teach our children and grandchildren to do the same. A church's impact in a neighborhood may take many decades of faithful work to be felt and seen in tangible ways.

► *In what areas is your family or Christian community waiting expectantly for the Lord? How can we continue to have hopeful expectation in the Lord and His unfailing love?*

### KEY VERSE

Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. —Psalm 130:7, KJV

Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. —Psalm 130:7, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 29 through August 4

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18—Promise of Hope.
- Tues.** Hebrews 10:19-25—Encourage One Another.
- Wed.** 2 Chronicles 30:21-27—A Joyous Celebration.
- Thurs.** Ecclesiastes 4:7-12—Two Are Better Than One.
- Fri.** Galatians 6:1-10—Bear One Another's Burdens.
- Sat.** Psalm 121—My Help Comes from the Lord.
- Sun.** 1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5—Encouraged in Faith.